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## **BRONZE WINE KRATERS FROM ANCIENT MACEDONIA**



Macedon-Hegemon Editions



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Above: elegant vine krater in bronze and silver from Macedonia. From the Shelby White and Leon Levy private collection in New York, handed over to Grease on 1 August 2008. This krater is one of the best examples of Macedonian craftsmanship type. It has a thin oblique disc-shaped cover and an ornate stand (hypokraterion). The body of the central vase is gilded with tendrils and vine

leaves made of fine silver sheets. The relief heads on the handle attachments are probably to be associated with the god Dionis and his milieu. A similar krater in the Solun Archaeological Museum was found at Sevaste, in Pieria, a region in south-west Macedonia. These two kraters, together with another discovered at Aigai, the first capital of the Macedonians, and two volute kraters found at Derveni, the one from Koreshnica and two others from Trebenishte in Republic of Macedonia, are all attributed to the superb Macedonic metallurgy workshop. These monumental kraters were vessels for mixing wine with water and were used by the nobility as urns to hold ashes. About 340 BCE. Accession number: 26769. "National" Archaeological Museum of Athens, Greece.

The Bronze Age is a prehistoric period that followed the Stone Age, when thanks to the discovery of metallurgy certain weapons and tools came to be made of copper and bronze alloy rather than stone. But, ancient people for very long time had groped in the dark from using only copper to making bronze alloy. The Bronze Age in the Southeastern Europe began in the late 4th and early 3rd millennium BCE and preceded the Iron Age. It is associated with the very beginnings of the urban life and development of the first far-ranging trade networks, as well as the spread of the European civilization throughout Eurasian continental landmass.

The Macedonian Bronze Age had three phases, Early, Middle and Late, delimited not so much by stratigraphic as by ceramic changes. If we cannot fix the beginning of the Early Bronze Age in Macedonia with precision, it must however be placed nearer 2500 than 2000. The beginning of the Late Bronze Age is determined by the rise of painted pottery of Macedonian character, in a style which is little more than the translation into paint of the earlier Incised style somewhat elaborated, and by a developed class of Incised ware, also based upon the old. The 'wishbone'\* handle is a distinctive Macedonian product, and when it is found in association with other pottery showing Macedonian affinities it may reasonably be taken as evidence of the presence of Macedonians. We have found this to be the case in Thessaly during the Early Bronze Age, and have explained its presence there as due to the southward expansion of the Macedonian Early Bronze population. The habits of the Macedonian folk underwent little change during the two thousand and odd years covered by this study.<sup>1</sup>

\* Probably just another one of the genuine Macedonian inventions.

As Childe has shown, there is a good reason to suppose that there was a strong Aryan element in Troy II, with the culture which is closely connected to the Macedonian Early Bronze Age culture, especially in its later phase. Recognizable diacritics of these Barb-Aryans are held to be the high-handled cups, specific pottery, the possession of the horse(s), and finally, unique rituals, characteristic only for the Macedonians and Hittites. The 'Proto-Minyan' elements (which Childe was also the first to recognize) in the pottery of the IVth Thessalian Period can also now be accounted for as of Macedonian origin. This initial Aryan element in the Macedonian race would be subsequently reinforced on three occasions, first by the returning 'Minyans' in Chalcidice; next by the foundation of Mycenaean settlements, and finally by the Lausitz people, who were perhaps proto-Gaul or Getae, and would introduce a fresh Aryan strain into the already Aryanized or Aryan stock.

Macedonia, which is slightly larger than the state of Vermont, and with a population of only 2 million, has some 6,000 registered archaeological sites. Out of these, from the Bronze Age alone, there's a hundreds of archaeological locations scattered throughout the country. Known to archaeologists and historians as 'Anatolian-Macedonian' civilization of the Early Bronze Age, people who lived in these locations have firmly established themselves as a distinguished ethnicity with recognizable characteristics around 2600 BCE in Macedonian Peninsula, and as far as Cappadocia, then spread gradually south toward Thessaly and, filtering into Asia Minor reached there its limit of expansion about 2000 BCE. A new study of the DNA recovered from an ancient Philistine site in the Israeli city of Ashkelon confirms what we already know from the Bible and other ancient sources – that the origin of the Philistines too is in southern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The 12 princely tombs discovered at Trebenište near Ohrid and dated 6th century BCE, the tumulus at Berantsi near Bitola, Krivi Dol near Štip (Astibo), and Dabitsi near the city of Veles, are just some representatives of the growth of nobility in Macedonia in the first millennium BCE.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Heurtley "Prehistoric Macedonia, an archaeological reconnaissance" p.128-130.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Netanyahu-Archaeology-DNA-prove-Palestinians-not-native-to-Land-of-Israel-594872>



**Below: Copper and Bronze tools and weapons unearthed from the tumulus at the village of Kravari near Bitola. Bitola Museum, 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE**



At Trebenište, the ten male graves with their bronze helmets and swords, and three female graves with their jewelry, clothes and pottery, hands and faces covered with gold and golden masks (5 found so far), were not common peoples graves. This Royal necropolis was particularly rich with findings and unraveled the unexpected wealth, high cultural and civilization achievements, influence and connections between the Macedonian tribes in the ancient world. The large krater in bronze found in 1930 in Tomb 7 of the necropolis of Trebenište (near Lake Ohrid in Macedonia), was the subject of a complex program of study and restoration involving several specialists and qualified professionals in order to benefit from the opportunity to gather every knowledge available (during the krater's temporary restoration-stay in Italy). The artifact – a masterpiece of 6th century BCE toreutics – is indeed one of the extremely rare archaic kraters that have survived to this day (together with the other example found in the Tomb 1 of the same necropolis, robbed by Bulgar occupation forces during the Balkan Wars and now part of the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Sofia in Bulgaria; and the monumental krater discovered at Vix, in France). Among the rare artifacts belonging to this category, that of Trebenište is the only publicly known krater to

be on a tripod.<sup>3</sup>

Below: **Bronze Wine Krater 500-450 BCE (circa)**, today in the British Museum. Of “uncertain provenience”, found in pieces in Locri, Italy. Most of the body was missing and is modern reconstruction



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<sup>3</sup> “Il cratere a volute su hypokrateridion da Trebenište. Studi, ricerche ed interventi di restauro”, Bollettino di Archeologia On Line, Direzione generale per le antichità II, 2011/4. Ministero per i Beni E Le Attività Culturali.  
<http://www.bollettinodiarcheologiaonline.beniculturali.it/bollettino.php>





Left: One of the two bronze wine krater from the Royal tombs discovered near the village of Trebenishte, north of Ohrid. Robbed from Macedonia by the Serbian occupation forces sometime between 1930/1933. Today part of the permanent collection of Serbian “National” Museum in Belgrad

Below: Bronze helmet from the same site of Trebenishte, Macedonia



Above: Different bronze figurines from Macedonia – bronze Maenad from Tetovo, 6th century BCE, Dedal found at Plaoshnik, 3rd century BCE, and a bronze horse figurine from the valley of river Vardar

Next page: Ancient Hittite-Macedonian bronze<sup>4</sup> and stone-incised artifacts from the 7th-6th and 15th century BCE Macedonian Peninsula. Paionian bronze spiral-fibulas and bronze Paionian Solar Disk in form of amulet on the lower and above left image, Archaeological Museum of Macedonia

<sup>4</sup> “Macedonian bronzes” by Nikos Chaushidis.





Beside the various bronze tools, weaponry, jewels, etc., one very particular item found frequently in the Macedonian royal tombs is the bronze wine krater – a large deep bronze bowl used for mixing wine with spices in ancient times. These wine kraters present a unique recognizable form of ancient craftsmen, manufactured repeatedly in all sizes and colors, although the basic material almost always remained the bronze alloy. The largest one found so far, publicly known to the modern science and archaeology, is high 1,63 meters and weights 200 kg. It was excavated at Vix in France, in what appeared to be the ancient queen's tomb. The surviving bronze kraters like this one are few, but those of which the provenance is known still fewer. Nevertheless, this huge bronze wine krater from Vix was not of local manufacture, but to what is now France it was imported – most probably from Ancient Macedonia.

Modern Eurocentric conventional scientists still have huge difficulties in admitting the Macedonian origin of these bronze vessels, since most of them through time were stolen from Macedonia and are now



part of private collections and foreign museums. They intentionally misinterpret them as *Etruscan*, *Corinthian*, *Halkidian*, etc., but traces and records of the ancient artisans and their most probable directions of trade from the end of the archaic period onwards are between Macedonia and Epirus with Campania and Apulia. As most of these specific bronze vessels findings are concentrated in Macedonia the conclusion is inescapable. The foremost specialist on this matter, Claude Rolley, explains what can be seen for instance with the volute crater from Agrigento, buried at the end of the 5th century BCE, which is identical to the famous golden-plated bronze krater found in Derveni (Thesalia), which is according to him undoubtedly made in Macedonia in the second half of the 4th century BCE. Despite Rolley's expertise and all the difficulties to date or find the origins of such a notorious-difficult artifacts, as smuggled ancient bronze vessels, all must agree on one thing – that they are most frequently found in Macedonia with the same unmistakably recognizable pattern on its foot.



**Above: Bronze wine krater (upper ornamental part, handles and carrying tripod are missing). Macedonia, 6th century BCE, Bitola museum, Republic of Macedonia.**

**Below: Bronze amphora and bronze situla from 'Crkvište' archaeological site, near the village of Berantsi. Republic of Macedonia, 4th century BCE, Bitola museum.**





What is easy to notice even for a non-expert eye, beside the same material and color, is the similarity or almost identical shape and ornaments of these bronze vessels. Same as the toreutic way of crafting them. The neck and mouth with its ovolo and beaded border cast to shape, its prolongation a squat body of same thickness as the rim, are heated, hammered and annealed repeatedly, thinning the metal and stretching the vessels to their final form. The handles and the foot are usually attached to the body by soft solder (tin or lead) and the parts of the stand, though a very tight fit, were reinforced with the same. The parts that were missing and pieces broken off of these ancient artifacts, has been painstakingly reproduced during the restoration, without any additions, as they were when assembled. The only other distinctive mark that connects all this bronze vessels, beside the almost identical shape, is their common origin – Macedonia.

Below: **Comparing the forma and origin of different ancient bronze kraters and similar vessels:**



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3.



4.

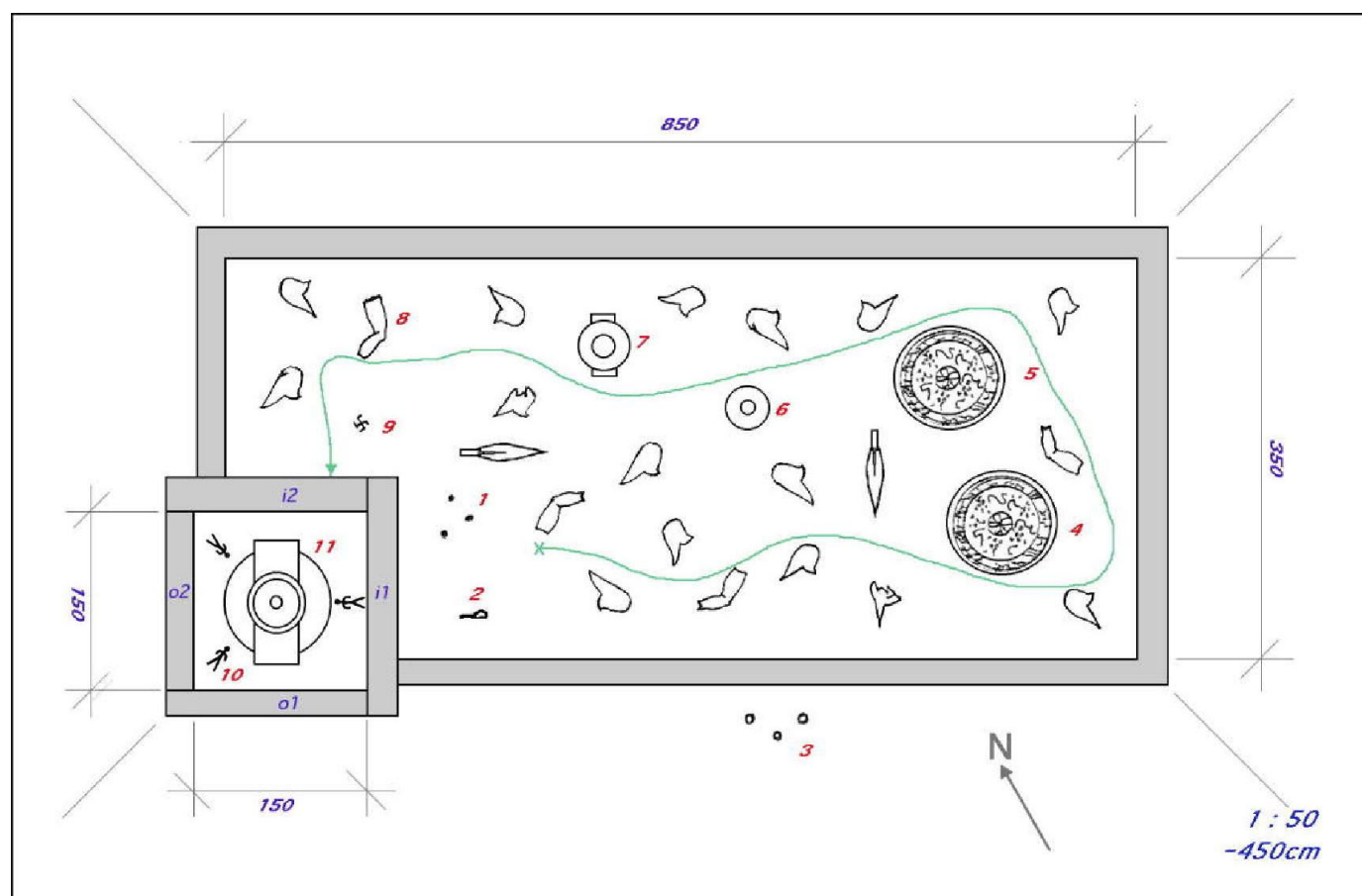


1. Bronze amphora from 'Crkvište' site, near the village of Berantsi. Macedonia, 4th century BCE;
2. Small bronze volute krater of unclear origin, (Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, USA);
3. The bronze krater (with missing upper ornamental part, handles and carrying tripod) from 'Crkvište' site, near the village of Berantsi. Macedonia, 4th century BCE;
4. Two bronze kraters from Trebenište near Ohrid. Macedonia, 6th century BCE (one is now in the Serbia's "National" Museum in Belgrad, the other in Archaeological Museum of Sofia in Bulgaria);
5. The bronze lantern found with a clay lamp inside, decorated on both sides with two heads of ancient god Pan, found in the Royal tomb 2 in ancient Macedonian capital Aigai, near Kutlesh (now renamed "*Vergina*"). Aegean Macedonia, 4th century BCE (exposed at the museum of Royal Tombs in Kutlesh);
6. The bronze krater from Vix of unclear origin. France 5th century BCE;
7. The golden-plated bronze krater from Derveni, Thesalia. 3rd century BCE. (According to expertise by Claude Rolley - of Macedonian provenience).
8. The bronze volute krater, circa 500-450 BCE, British Museum. Of uncertain provenience, found in pieces in Locri, Italy. Most of the body is not original but modern reconstruction.
9. Two similar bronze calyx kraters from Pieria, a region in south-west Macedonia

As we can see from the list of the shown kraters above – 8 out of 11 publicly known bronze kraters and similar bronze objects of certain origin are from Macedonia. But very few are to be seen in the museums in the land of origin.

Yet another bronze krater, on loan from the Levy / White Collection and appeared briefly on display in the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, was recently looted (in 1996) from an archaeological site near the village of Korešnica in the southern part of the Republic of Macedonia. This krater, which is thought to be among the ten most beautiful artifacts in the world, was excavated in the mid nineties and smuggled from Macedonia through secret diplomatic-military channels. The high-level diplomatic criminal conduct of this operation was very obvious, given that the krater in question, which is currently in the private collection of Shelby White in the U.S. – is allegedly about 2 meters high.<sup>5</sup> It was claimed that there is no evidence of how it was excavated and smuggled, no documentation, no witnesses, and yet the most interesting thing in this case is how the Internet-related drawings and sections of the tomb where the artifact was discovered with a dozen of other items that originate from 6th century BCE appeared on the web.

**Below: the plan of the looted tomb 5 from Korešnica appeared on internet. Among the artifacts were the three bronze warriors figurines (10) placed around the huge bronze krater (11) which contained cremated remains. The tomb also contained two shields, pieces of body armor, spears, and a number of helmets.**



So, there were witnesses, and they knew how to complete their work very professionally. The place, located just to the north of Stena (*Demir Kapija*), is hardly on any map, but is visible in high resolution on

<sup>5</sup> <http://macedoniadaily.blogspot.com/2006/11/pasko-kuzman-wants-to-return-krater.html>



Google Earth (41°26'06''N 22°14'20''E). The looting took place in 1996 and the pillaged site comprises of a mayor royal tomb.<sup>6</sup> In 2008, two British archeologists, Dominic Paulsen and Ruben Torp began with geo-scanning of the area using the equipment provided by Great Britain, in order to re-open excavations on the ground, but unfortunately these activities had stop since.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://lootingmatters.blogspot.com/2008/02/bronze-krater-from-republic-of.html>

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